

Even the Dead Try to Warn Her

"You told the receptionist you are worried about death. Is that why you are here?"

"I'm not just worried." Augustine said. "I'm positively terrified of death. It's just out there and I know that people keep dying around me. I think they are warning me. That terrifies me."

"Augustine, you are only seventeen. Why are you scared of dying?"

"No. I'm not scared of dying. I'm scared of others dying, I'm scared of dead people; and maybe also that they die because of me."

"In what way are people are dying because of you?"

"I don't know." Augustine paused, looked around the room and finally thumped her hands on the table. "It's just - I feel that they die because of me. So many people die around me. It started with my granddad and now it's like there is no month without death."

"What happened with your granddad?"

"I don't know. I think it was a heart attack, or maybe something with his brain. The thing wasn't his death, it was the way I saw him on the bed."

"After his death?"

"Yes, my mother found him and she called my stepdad to help her or something, and he took me along. I was only fourteen then, so I mean, I knew what death was, but I had never seen it; I had never seen anyone dead."

"And you saw your grandfather dead?"

"He was in the bedroom. My mom said I should stay outside. I

already smelled it, this weird sweetly rotting smell. But Mark, that's my stepdad, he told me to go inside to say goodbye. I didn't really think about it. I knew I didn't want to, but he told me to go inside and so I did."

"And my granddad was lying there, with one arm on the bed and the rest of his body sitting on the floor and leaning against the bed. He looked like he had just fallen out of the bed – but then his face, it looked so full of pain and his mouth was open and his eyes were completely gone. Those eyes, I still see them in my dream, the gaping holes in his face."

"You have nightmares about your grandfather?"

"I had a few. But that's not what I mean. I can still see him, you know? I still see this face in front of me, while I'm eating or showering or watching TV. He seems to be saying something, something horrible and painful, that's how I see his face, as if he is telling me that I did a horrible thing, or maybe somebody else."

"Did you feel that when you saw his body?"

"I think so. I was just so taken aback by the way he looked, how his face was falling apart. I stared at his eyes and then I ran out of the room and threw up. But already then I noticed the way his mouth was open, as if he had tried to say something."

"And you said there were more deaths?"

"Yes." Augustine said; then she pulled her hands back to her body.

"Can you give me an example?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Okay. I mean, there were just so many. It's been nearly three years and every month somebody I know dies."

"For example?"

"Like, the next month, after we found grandpa, our neighbor died.

We went to the funeral but it was a closed casket. We sat far in the back during the funeral, but even then I felt uncomfortable, I felt as if this casket was going to open and that woman would scream something at me.”

“And then the next, I think the next was one of my former classmates. He had a car accident. And I heard that they found him too with his mouth wide open, as if he was screaming or shouting.”

“I wouldn’t think that is unusual for accident victims?”

“I don’t know whether it is. But when I close my eyes or think about him, or even when I see his old pictures, all I see is this wide open mouth, and it seems to be trembling, as if he is desperate to tell me something.”

“You think the dead want to tell you something?”

“I’m not sure. It’s, you know, I’m not hundred percent sure. But really, every single month someone dies; a neighbor or old friend or acquaintance, or the guy at the corner store, or a classmate, or a friend of my mom’s, or one of my old babysitters. But every single month somebody I know dies. And – “

Augustine pressed her lips together.

“And?” I prodded.

“And all I know of died with their mouth wide open. Not just open, but wide open. As if they were trying to scream or shout something. As if there was something they knew that they desperately needed to tell. And I’m the only thing that connects those people, you know? I think they are trying to tell me something. I think they are trying to warn me or something.”

“Are you sure that many of them died with their mouths open?”

“Yes. Like, all of the ones I know of. At the end of last year it was

one of my mom's friends, the burial was in an open casket and she had her mouth shut. But during the ceremony one of the persons in the front row screamed and then some others started screaming and people started rushing out of the room. Outside one of the people said that her mouth had opened during the ceremony. They had sewn it shut, you know, for the ceremony. But her mouth opened and she ripped those strings."

Augustine shook her head.

"That was for me, you know? That was for me. I just know it. They all want to tell me something. And in my dreams I can see them, how all these people that died are standing there, just standing, not doing anything else, and then they open their mouths and I can't hear it."

"Augustine, we could give you something to sleep better and against the anxiety." I said.

"No!" She screamed. "I can't go back out there. I have to hide."

"You have to hide?"

"It's this guy I met last month. I mean, he talked to me in a coffee shop and then asked me for a second date and I went. I never should have gone; I knew it was a bad idea. I knew I shouldn't meet any people, that I'm a danger for them. And I've been feeling really paranoid the last weeks, as if something is behind me and following me and watching me. Not really anything specific, just something is there, and it feels as if this thing is getting closer. I always was a bit scared of the dark and stuff like that, but now I can't even sleep with the lights off anymore. I always have to have light and I hate being alone. It's as if any time I'm alone this thing gets closer."

"And then, this guy, he was really nice and fun and really cute. I knew I shouldn't, but I wanted to meet him again, that was last week."

“You had your second date last week?”

“Yes, I mean, we would have. He had asked me to meet him in the same coffee shop where we met. I was running a bit late and feeling guilty for it. So I just slammed myself onto the chair across from him, I didn’t even really say hello. I was searching in my back for money, I think. But the thing is I didn’t really look at his face. I should have looked at him. I should have seen how pale he was, how he was gasping for air.”

“He smiled at me when I came in. And then when I sat down, I didn’t look. He must have been pale already. But I only noticed it when he began to lean to the side, when he was nearly off the chair, and I saw his hands cramped to his chest.”

“I caught him the moment he fell on the floor. But I couldn’t save him, you know? I didn’t know what to do. I thought I had to press on his chest or something, like in the movies. But I didn’t want to make it worse. And all the other people just stared and nobody did anything.”

“He died before the ambulance arrived. He died right there, in the coffee shop. And I had my arms on him and pushed his chest, but I didn’t even know what I was doing. I probably made it even worse.”

“But the thing I really can’t forget was his mouth. It was shortly before he stopped moving; he suddenly opened his mouth really wide and then moved his lips and whispered something. At first I heard ‘bride’. I said ‘bride’ back to him, as a question, but he only ripped his mouth open even wider, and then his lips moved together again and he whispered again and I heard it right that time. He said ‘hide’. He said ‘hide’ and then his mouth ripped open and he stopped moving.”

“And since then this paranoia, I have it all day. Every moment I feel that there is something watching me, and that it is just waiting to attack. Every single moment, and it keep getting worse. And since he died, you know, every night I wake up crying

because I hear his voice in my head and see his mouth wide open and this fear in his eyes. And once, during the night, I also saw my granddad and I also saw my mom's friend, the one who ripped her mouth open at the funeral. They are still standing there, with their mouths wide open, but then it closes for a moment and I can't hear them but I know what they are saying. They say 'hide'."